

NAXOS
AudioBooks

**CLASSIC
FICTION**

Charles Dickens **Hard Times**

Read by **Anton Lesser**



NA311012D

1	BOOK THE FIRST – Sowing – Part 1	1:45
2	BOOK THE FIRST – Sowing – Part 2	4:41
3	BOOK THE FIRST – Sowing – Part 3	5:34
4	BOOK THE FIRST – Sowing – Part 4	7:07
5	BOOK THE FIRST – Sowing – Part 5	4:04
6	BOOK THE FIRST – Sowing – Part 6	10:51
7	BOOK THE FIRST – Sowing – Part 7	6:45
8	BOOK THE FIRST – Sowing – Part 8	7:31
9	BOOK THE FIRST – Sowing – Part 9	6:17
10	BOOK THE FIRST – Sowing – Part 10	3:47
11	BOOK THE FIRST – Sowing – Part 11	5:52
12	BOOK THE FIRST – Sowing – Part 12	4:28
13	BOOK THE FIRST – Sowing – Part 13	6:26
14	BOOK THE FIRST – Sowing – Part 14	4:17

15	BOOK THE SECOND – Reaping – Part 1	8:25
16	BOOK THE SECOND – Reaping – Part 2	8:30
17	BOOK THE SECOND – Reaping – Part 3	3:18
18	BOOK THE SECOND – Reaping – Part 4	6:55
19	BOOK THE SECOND – Reaping – Part 5	5:43
20	BOOK THE SECOND – Reaping – Part 6	14:18
21	BOOK THE SECOND – Reaping – Part 7	9:53
22	BOOK THE SECOND – Reaping – Part 8	11:02
23	BOOK THE SECOND – Reaping – Part 9	7:31
24	BOOK THE SECOND – Reaping – Part 10	3:54
25	BOOK THE SECOND – Reaping – Part 11	8:05
26	BOOK THE SECOND – Reaping – Part 12	5:07

27	BOOK THE THIRD – Garnering – Part 1	5:38
28	BOOK THE THIRD – Garnering – Part 2	7:35
29	BOOK THE THIRD – Garnering – Part 3	7:24
30	BOOK THE THIRD – Garnering – Part 4	6:45
31	BOOK THE THIRD – Garnering – Part 5	8:43
32	BOOK THE THIRD – Garnering – Part 6	8:37
33	BOOK THE THIRD – Garnering – Part 7	9:44
34	BOOK THE THIRD – Garnering – Part 8	3:15
35	BOOK THE THIRD – Garnering – Part 9	6:57

Total time: 3:56:44

Charles Dickens

Hard Times

Charles Dickens began to plan the story which was to become *Hard Times* in the winter of 1853-4, and it is clear from the trouble he took over the choice of a title, as well as the correspondence he entered into concerning themes and their treatment, that he wanted to be sure that his novel would hit its satirical targets without causing too much offence – a difficult balancing act to achieve.

On January 20th he asked John Forster to look at fourteen possible titles (which included 'Prove It', 'Simple Arithmetic' and the eventual choice, *Hard Times*). In April he wrote to Mrs Gaskell, the novelist of northern industrial England, asking her to 'look at the story' and 'judge where and how near I seem to be approaching what you have in your mind.' Dickens was clearly uncertain about some aspects of his tone and subject matter – he is careful to state that he will be avoiding the controversial issue of workers' strikes, and perhaps he was also (understandably) unsure about straying outside his normal London-based settings and having to reproduce a Lancashire dialect.

What are Dickens' 'satirical targets'?

First, as he says in a letter to another friend, Charles Knight, he wishes to attack 'those who see figures and averages, and nothing else' – in other words, the 'Gradgrind Philosophy', in which mechanical reason is seen as the only possible guide to human behaviour and endeavour, and which is represented in the novel not only by Gradgrind himself but also by the industrial machines and the profits they yield. Dickens also mocks (for example) the callousness and ignorance of Parliament (peopled by the 'dustmen', the MPs), and the cynical behaviour of 'gentlemen' like James Harthouse who have 'no opinions' – in other words, no beliefs and no principles.

What makes the novel powerful and affecting, however, is the way in which we see these attitudes corroding human relationships: Gradgrind attempting to destroy his children's imaginations with a relentless diet of 'ologies', Harthouse setting about the seduction of Louisa with heartless calculation, Bounderby denying the affectionate care he received from his mother so that he may aggrandise the myth of his wretched childhood, vital to his image as the self-made man. There are

weaknesses, to be sure – some of the pathos may seem a little heavy-handed to a modern listener, and it is difficult to see Stephen Blackpool as more than a mouthpiece for certain ideas – but the ultimate picture of a society in which decent human beings are sacrificed to the gods of profit remains powerful and relevant today. Although *Hard Times* is less humorous, more economical and more explicitly ‘political’ than his other novels, its central message is movingly and characteristically Dickensian: if there is no place for imagination, beauty and pleasure in our world, then ‘the...heart will wither up’ and ‘the sturdiest physical manhood will be morally stark death.’ Or, as Mr Sleary inimitably puts it, ‘People mutht be amuthed. They can’t be alwayth a-learning, nor yet they can’t be alwayth a-working, they ain’t made for it...’

Charles Dickens was born in 1812 in Portsmouth. His father was imprisoned for debt and the twelve-year-old Charles was sent to work in a blacking factory: these experiences influenced (for instance) *Little Dorrit* and *David Copperfield*. Having learnt shorthand, he became a Parliamentary reporter and began to submit magazine pieces. In 1837 *The Pickwick Papers* brought Dickens fame, and the rest of his literary career was almost uninterruptedly successful. His personal life was less happy:

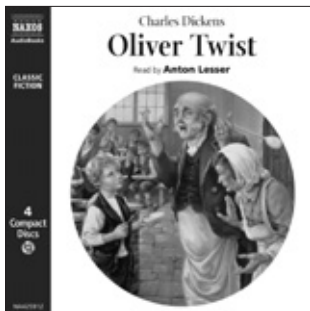
eventually he separated from his wife Catherine, partly as a result of his growing intimacy with Ellen Ternan, the actress, and he died relatively young in 1870, his last novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, unfinished.

Notes by Perry Keenlyside

**The music on this recording is taken from
the NAXOS and MARCO POLO catalogues**

SAUGUET SYMPHONY NO. 1 Moscow Symphony Orchestra, Antonio de Almeida	8.223463
HILL SYMPHONY NO. 3 Queensland Symphony Orchestra, Wilfred Lehmann	8.223537
BLOCH SYMPHONY IN C SHARP MINOR Slovak Philharmonic, Stephen Gunzenhauser	8.223103
MENDELSSOHN STRING SYMPHONIES Northern Chamber Orchestra, Nicholas Ward	8.553162

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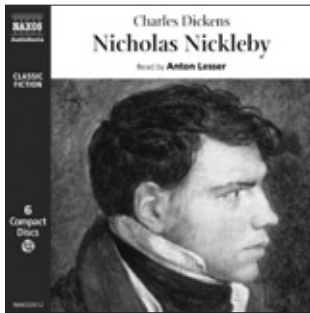
Oliver Twist

(Dickens) 4CD – NA425912



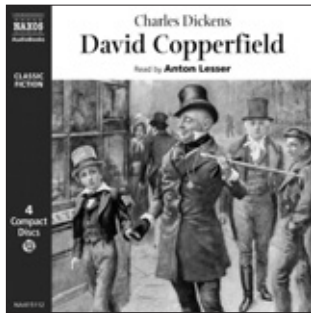
Great Expectations

(Dickens) 4CD – NA408212



Nicholas Nickleby

(Dickens) 6CD – NA632612



David Copperfield

(Dickens) 4CD – NA415112

Charles Dickens

Hard Times

Read by **Anton Lesser**

In this, Dickens' most openly political novel, we discover the terrible human consequences of a ruthlessly materialistic philosophy in the lives of Thomas Gradgrind's family, brought up to believe that only 'Facts! Facts! Facts!' have any meaning. Set in Coketown, a typical Lancashire milltown, the novel graphically exposes the truth about Victorian 'progress'.



Anton Lesser has played many of the principal Shakespearean roles for the Royal Shakespeare Company, including Petruchio, Romeo and Richard III. He starred in the Royal National Theatre production of *Wild Oats*. Appearances in major TV drama productions include *The Mill on the Floss* and *The Politician's Wife*. He also reads *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Great Expectations*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Oliver Twist*, *The Pickwick Papers*, *David Copperfield*, *Paradise Lost*, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* for Naxos AudioBooks.

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Total time
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